SYNDICALISM

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD

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SYNDICALISM

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A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

BY

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book is based upon six articles on Syndicalism which appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* during May 1912, and I am greatly indebted to the editor and proprietors of that newspaper for the favour of allowing me to publish these articles in their present form. They have, however, been substantially altered and expanded, so that the book is not merely a reprint.

It is in vain that one searches in English dictionaries for the word Syndicalism. It is a French stranger in our language, with no registered abode as yet. Had it not been an ugly word it would probably never have been brought over, for it has achieved fame by reason of its capacity to frighten. The House of Commons is often dull and is rarely amusing, but if any one who has studied Syndicalist literature is left with nothing but the forbidding pages of *Hansard* for recreation, he will find the debate on Syndicalism, which took place on the 27th of March 1912, refreshingly delectable in its simple innocence and its charming revelation of the ordinary Englishman's mind under the influence of a bogey. If Syndicalism could only think for itself it would be in a great

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state of mental perturbation, for in France it is an innocent thing, meaning nothing more or less than trade unionism. There are two wings of trade unionism in France, however, the *syndicalisme réformiste* and the *syndicalisme révolutionnaire;* but Syndicalism has come to indicate in the English tongue the ideas and policy of the latter alone.

In that narrow sense I am to try and explain what it means. It ought to be made clear, however, that the *syndicaliste réformiste* commands the confidence of the greater part of French trade unionists, and follows a policy similar to that of our own Labour Party. He believes in politics; he co-operates with the Socialist Party. He has an organ of his own, *La Revue Syndicaliste,* edited by Albert Thomas, a member of the Chamber of Deputies, and, judging by what indications recent votes at Trade Union Congresses in France can give of the flow of opinion, he may soon dominate the policy of the Confédération Générale du Travail itself.

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SYNDICALISM

CHAPTER I

TRADE UNIONISM, SOCIALISM, SYNDICALISM

SYNDICALISM is a programme of trade union action aimed at the ending of the present capitalist system. Its organisation is exactly the same as that of our own trade societies; it asks the workmen to combine in unions, to unite the local branches of those unions in trades councils, and to federate the national organisations in an all-comprehending central body, which in France is the famous Confédération Générale du Travail, commonly known by its initials, the C.G.T. Syndicalism might have borrowed all this part of its system from the old-fashioned British unions. In fact, it is British trade unionism applied to revolutionary purposes; it is British realism captured by French idealism. Like our unions, it is willing to work for increases of wages, reductions in hours, and improvements in conditions; although it is opposed to political

action, as I shall show presently, it is willing to accept legislation beneficial to workmen. Its membership, its leadership, and its inspiration are, like our old unionism, working class, and its gates are jealously guarded against any other feet. In short, one can describe the organisation of Syndicalism and the personnel of its ranks only by tearing a chapter from the history of British trade unionism relating to the time when the leaders of the last generation were on the ascendant.

Even in the dreaded weapon of Syndicalism, the strike, we find nothing but the ancient weapon of British trade unionism. Combinations of workmen, isolated in society, praised as our unions used to be for minding their own business and not interfering in legislation, can enforce their will only in one way. They can lay down their tools. It is, therefore, not by a servile copying, but it is a proof of the inevitability of certain sequences, that Syndicalism and trade unionism, with a vision narrowed to the experience of the workshop alone, and a field of operation confined to industrial action, should have so much in common that the former may be regarded as nothing more than a revolutionary form of the latter.

But one quickly comes to the point of divergence. The changes which I have said it is willing to work for and accept are not the goal of Syndicalism; they

are not its vital purpose. They are incidents in the way. An unbending Syndicalist of the Left would say they are the apples thrown by the existing State at the feet of Labour to impede it in its race. For Syndicalism does not seek merely to reform. Modern society is wrong fundamentally. It is built up so that great masses must be poor. Possession is so arranged that it must exploit. Classes are allowed to control the means of production and distribution in such a way that they live on tolls which their economic power enables them to impose upon the working and producing classes. The difference between the modern wage earner and the slave of old time is nominal and superficial; the likeness is essential. Both are absolutely under the thumb of employers, the workman being just as unable as the slave to think for himself or arrange his life for himself. Until the producers control the means of production, they cannot be free; until economic power is democratised as political power has been, men must live under an economic tyranny. This also is a Socialist diagnosis of social ill.

Hence, just as Syndicalism stands with one foot on trade unionism, so it stands with the other partly on Socialism—but only partly. For whilst Socialism asks that economic power should be put in the hands of the community, Syndicalism asks that each industrial group of workers should control the

instruments of production which it uses—the railwaymen, the railways; the miners, the mines, and so on. This is really not essential to Syndicalism, and consequently is not the characteristic difference between it and Socialism. At present the Syndicalist is opposed to nationalisation because the State authorities are still capitalist, and so he argues: "If the railways were nationalised the workers on them would still be under capitalist conditions; therefore, I do not want the State, but the organised workers themselves, to own them."

Curiously enough, this is only a reiteration of the discredited doctrine of individualist labour co-partnership, which asked us to dream of "the self-governing workshop." The self-governing workshop puts an end to none of the evils of capitalism, and if it is federated, as the Syndicalists wish, into a national federation, it becomes a monopoly as dangerous to the community as any capitalist trust. But the Syndicalist really has in his mind the control of the means of production by a working-class State, because he is always careful to explain that industrial machinery, though owned by those who work it, would be used for the benefit of all. How this national interest in production is to be enforced he does not say, though on the whole he leaves one to assume that the controlling unions of workmen will be inspired by moral considerations—a very

uncertain basis upon which to found revolutionary action. I think, however, there are some indications that Syndicalism will not insist upon this, but that by and by it will abandon the craft control of industry and accept community control. Be that as it may, the fact that the Syndicalist founds his community on common property in the means of production used for common convenience and benefit, gives him, without being a Socialist, a right to stand on a small bit of the same ground as the Socialist.

The Syndicalist, however, is poles asunder from the Socialist in method, and method counts for everything in the process of social change. The Socialist believes in a combination of political and trade union action, the Syndicalist believes in trade union action alone; the Socialist appeals to the whole body of public opinion, the Syndicalist considers the working classes only; the Socialist brings about his changes by legislative moulding, he uses the organic State to transform itself by making such alterations in its own mind and circumstances as must precede all permanent change; the Syndicalist, cutting himself off from these organic formative influences, has to fall back upon force, either the passive force of social paralysis or the active force of riots, to effect his changes with revolutionary suddenness. No one who has the least knowledge

of Syndicalism on the one hand and of Socialism on the other can ever mix up the two.

In fact, Syndicalism is largely a revolt against Socialism. Socialism must be Parliamentary, or nothing. And there is nothing more galling to enthusiastic reformers, to whom the alluring vision of human perfection is very near as in a dream, than the heavy lumbering coach of Parliamentary progress, whether it is rolling creakingly along in London, in Paris, in Rome or in Berlin. Moreover, when a Socialist Party gets into Parliament, it gets into trouble. Will it make *blocs?* Will it keep Governments in office and Oppositions out of office? Will it take long views of its responsibilities or will it say, "Sufficient unto the day is the Bill, or the resolution or the amendment thereof"? All that is tribulation and vexation of spirit. They have been in this land of storms and of dust for many years in France. They have formed *blocs* and put M. Millerand in a Ministry; and that has brought difficulties. They have washed themselves clean of compromise, and, like Brahmins, have purified themselves after their contact with bourgeois parties; and that has not brought peace.

Meanwhile, men have contrasted this apparent confusion with the promises of decisive, direct action. A combination, a united demand, a strike, a sympathetic strike, a general strike! On paper,

what can stand against such action? Look what happens in everyday experience. Men lay down their tools; workshops are thrown idle; employers have to surrender; wages are forced up; hours are brought down. It is all done swiftly, and when finished the gains are definite. This is a method of change rival to that of political action. That is the appeal. The cost of strikes is never totalled up; the advisability of spending the money in other ways is not considered; a profit and loss account is never thought about. An exciting chase and the capture of a mouse to-day is, to some minds, more worth doing, than a humdrum stalk to-day and the securing of a stag to-morrow. "Workmen," says Sorel, the leading figure amongst the French revolutionary Syndicalists, "believe in the experience of a comrade who has never demanded anything from you, and who has seen too closely into men to be taken in by mere appearances; occupy yourselves with your own affairs, that is to say, organise your unions and your co-operative undertakings, federate yourselves with your fellow-countrymen to discuss practical questions, leave the politicians to injure themselves to the full."

That is the ground-plan of Syndicalism. Essentially and characteristically a programme of action, it is being preached to revive trade unionism of the old kind, and to draw workmen away from politics

as a means of social amelioration. In explaining and defending itself, it has had to commit itself to certain important consequences of its principles. It is anti-State, anti-militarist, anti-patriotic. It is opposed to industrial conciliation, whether voluntary or compulsory. Every dispute between employer and workman is but an incident in the universal and ceaseless war between the exploiter and the exploited. It comes to organise, to cheer, to discipline the workers for that war. It conceives itself to be the Napoleonic effort which is to end that war for ever and establish peace by the victory of labour.

CHAPTER II

POLITICAL ACTION AND THE GENERAL STRIKE

THE beginning of all Syndicalist theories and actions is a belief in the class war. "The class struggle," exclaims Felicien Challaye in his admirable study, *Syndicalisme révolutionnaire et Syndicalisme réformiste*, "there is the basis of Syndicalism." Society, it is argued, is divided into two great classes, that of the exploiter and that of the exploited. All other differences sink into insignificance before these. They are fundamental. Other people have played with this expression, as children play with a tin sword, but it has been left to the Syndicalist to construct from it an appropriate and logical programme of action. Indeed, no one who believes in the class war as the fundamental fact of society to-day has any refuge to protect himself against Syndicalist logic. Given the class war, Syndicalism is its necessary corollary.

Because of this belief, the Syndicalist rejects political action straightway. If the only reality in society is an exploiting and an exploited class, what are called "national" interests are merely phantasms.

The nation is a mere abstraction, for how can a tiger and its victim form a "community"? But the politician cannot help working with this abstraction. As a candidate he has to recognise it, and pander to it; if he happens to have the misfortune of being elected, it sits at his elbow in Parliament; he has to address it, and appeal to it; he gets his votes from it. The very word "citizen," the favourite toy of the politician, is sneered at by the Syndicalist, because it implies that all are equal at the ballot-box "without taking account of the differences of their economic conditions." In an article published in the *Mouvement Socialiste* of July 1906, Lagardelle, one of the ablest exponents of the Syndicalist creed, contrasts the Syndicalist and the democratic views of individual rights, and contends that whilst the latter admits of a suppression of the conscience of minorities, the latter believes in "the autonomy of the human being." The Syndicalist is not anti-State because he is disgusted with politics and politicians, but because his philosophy is anti-State.

By engaging in political action, argues the Syndicalist, the armies of the proletariat get mixed up, the pure faith is polluted, the class war is confused, the revolution is postponed. For a Parliamentary Party "continues to speak of the class war, but practises co-operation with other classes." "The bourgeois, bourgeois interests, bourgeois ambitions

and vanities, penetrate even the parties which call themselves working class." And this is inevitable. This confusion is in the nature of politics, and would show itself whatever kind of men the workers elected to represent them. As Sorel says : " For the workers, the revolution is a totally different thing from the victory of any political party."

This opposition to political action on grounds of principle is reinforced by another consideration. Le Bon pointed out in his *Psychology of the Crowd* that the mind of a mass of people was different not only in weight but also in quality from the mind of an individual. Now the Syndicalist lays the greatest stress upon solidarity. He suspects the individual ; he trusts the mass. The bearing of this upon his political convictions he expresses in this way : " Whilst the vote by show of hands in a meeting of strikers is a vote of the crowd, expressing the collective will of the mass and rousing enthusiasm, the individual vote cast for legislation destroys the sentiment of solidarity, which is indispensable for success." The political method is individualist ; the Syndicalist method is collectivist.

In addition to that, the Syndicalist finds that politics must become degraded. Politics is dominated by the rich, and this class, far more than an hereditary aristocracy, Sorel argues, suppresses popular right and subverts law. It changes the whole bent of the

Press, the Bench, the Church. As it was with Rome, so is it now in Western Europe, there is a tendency to "equalise classes on the basest type," and that must lead to ruin. The reason for this pessimism is that the driving power of the middle classes is money and possession, whilst that of the ancient aristocracy was tradition, in which there was some element of responsibility and duty. The way of politics therefore lies downward to destruction, because it is paved with the errors, the prejudices, the falseness of modern conditions which it cannot remove. Politics can never be the way of emancipation for the workers. They cannot teach themselves how to end their exploitation by going to the school which the bourgeoisie attended in order to learn how to take the place of the aristocracy. The method of bourgeois emancipation is essentially different from that of working-class emancipation. You can change the form of the political state, argues Lagardelle, but it will still be coercive.

Moreover, when the psychology of the politician is analysed, it is found to be that of the superior person, who thinks that he has a greater capacity to rule than the mass of the wage earners. Sorel, in particular, believes in equality in this respect, and he has this in mind when he insists on a literal rendering of the Marxian saying that only the workmen can emancipate the workmen. He states that Syndicalists have discovered that "the domination of public

authority is founded upon the pretended superiority of the intellectuals." The "intellectual proletariat" gives him great offence. Regarding our Fabian Society as their embodiment, he describes it as "middle-class, showing the mask of Socialism, snobbish on the one hand and cunning on the other." "The thought of the middle-class Socialist is dominated by the political prejudices of his class." In general he says of it: "It employs the most charlatan means for enhancing its prestige." It is all the more easy for it to do this because political methods assume a great inert mass, whilst Syndicalism calls for the participation and alertness of everybody. In this respect the Syndicalist shares the characteristic prejudices of some of our own trade unionists. In shutting his doors against the political intellectual the British trade unionist did not reject politics, however. He only said to the politician, "Meet me elsewhere, not here."

What, then, is the workman, hastening towards a new earth, to do? "Direct action," replies the Syndicalist. He must form industrial combinations, instead of political ones; he must strike at the enemy, and not march him out of his trenches. The workshop, and not the House of Commons, must be the scene of the conflict; economics, not politics, must be its issues. And the final blow is to be delivered by the general strike when, by the revolutionary use of his power to paralyse society, the

organised workman is to subdue the State to his will.

The general strike as a revolutionary device has always received favour from trade unionists. In the early history of British working-class agitation it occupies a prominent place. But it was not until 1892, when it was adopted by a district Congress held at Tours, and later on by a Trade Union Congress meeting at Marseilles, that it re-entered modern agitation. That worthy and interesting character, Pelloutier, was its sponsor; that far more doubtful character, Aristide Briand, was its most vociferously enthusiastic advocate.

The general strike is not a weapon of reform, a means of raising wages or of improving conditions, like the ordinary strike such as we know it. It is "purely speculative, and is dominated by the ideas of revolution." The nation can sleep whilst the politician talks and manœuvres and legislates. When he has done his worst the exploiter tears his Acts of Parliament to pieces, manipulates economic legislation in his own interests, and laughs at it all. The nation cannot sleep and the exploiter cannot laugh whilst a general strike is going on. This "direct action" hits somebody every time. It brings the working classes into the field without any mistake. Politics is diplomacy; "direct action" is war.

Herein lies the real conflict between Syndicalism and Socialism. Over and over again, especially in

France, attempts have been made at Syndicalist conferences to effect some alliance with Socialist bodies, but they have been invariably defeated owing to this difference of view, and the General Confederation of Labour has refused to send representatives to International Socialist Congresses, and even to International Congresses of trade unions, because they were dominated by Socialist opinion. Individual members are allowed to take what action "corresponds to their philosophical and political opinions," but "they must not introduce into the unions the opinions which they profess"; the unions, as such, must act on the assumption that industrial action is all-sufficient and is alone effective. Upon this ground a battle royal was fought at the congress which met at Amiens in October 1906, and in the end decisive majorities declared that Syndicalism is a new social theory, distinct from Socialism, because it takes a view of social relationship which is inconsistent with political action. "Syndicalism is the only grouping which judiciously reflects the antagonism of class. Pouget, one of the secretaries of the Confederation, commenting upon this congress and its chief business, writes: "The political movement and the economic movement are not comparable."

Thus we can map out the relationships of Trade Unionism, Socialism and Syndicalism, and understand what ground they hold in common and where they occupy hostile camps.

CHAPTER III

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOREL

SYNDICALISM is not merely a wild revolt of anarchistically inclined workmen; it has a philosophy. Its most distinguished advocate is one who is best described as a philosopher-poet, Georges Sorel, who once was an engineer, but who now, from his little home in Boulogne, supplies a philosophy to the Confédération Générale du Travail. It is all very interesting and quaint—and not a little mischievous. I have already indicated something of its meaning, but I shall now try to explain it more fully.

I must once more begin at the beginning. The present state of society is unjust, says the Syndicalist; it is composed of two sections—the exploiting and the exploited. How is it to be changed? That is the problem which Sorel sets for himself.

Most people would say: Sit down and think things out. Look ahead and prepare the new order by experience and forethought. Not so, says Sorel. That is a vain device of the intellectuals, of the politicians, of those who would delude the workers.

Institutions "are not the results of the decisions of statesmen or of the calculations of savants; they embrace and focus all the elements of life." It is important above everything else to keep life active, aspiring, creative. It must be agitated. The people without a vision perish, and the people with a vision cannot remain quiet. We have all experienced times when our feelings dethrone reason and calculations, and when the ordinary caution which bridles us is dispossessed of its authority, and the usual controlling motives lose their power. Then we do wonderful things which seem to transcend our ordinary conduct, and we appear to pass into a new kind of being.

Only thus, says Sorel, are great deeds done. "Man has genius only in proportion as he acts without reflection." Keep ideals pure, then act. It is not your reason that guides you, because its eyes are but blind. Your ideals enable you to re-create the world, and if the ideal is right, reflection only raises obstacles on a path which is in reality free of impediment if men would only walk boldly upon it. Have you the enthusiasm to act? Very well, then, act. So Sorel argues. The value of action depends upon burning enthusiasm, not upon wise forethought. A Socialist critic of Syndicalism has put the point in this way: "Action is the word of command of the Syndicalist; useful action is that of the Socialist trade unionist.

Undoubtedly there is a smack of Bergson about this. In the criticism of Bergson's philosophy which appeared in the *Hibbert Journal* of October 1911, Mr. Balfour wrote: "In rare moments of tension, when [man's] whole being is wound up for action, when memory seems fused with will and desire into a single impulse to *do*—*then* he knows freedom, *then* he touches reality, *then* he consciously sweeps along with the advancing wave of Time, which, as it moves, creates." Sorel might have written this in defence of Syndicalist action. Intuition and instinct are nearer to reality than the intellect. They are really life itself, moving in man, and felt by man. Intellect makes experience definite only by narrowing views. But Bergson assigns no useless or merely hampering rôle to the intellect. His position is conveniently summarised by Mr. Wildon Carr, in his *Henri Bergson: The Philosophy of Change*, in these sentences: "How then does knowledge serve action, and in what special way does intellectual knowledge serve action better than intuitional knowledge? . . . The intellect gives us the same advantage over intuition that the material tool gives to us as compared with the organical tool that the insect possesses. It opens a practically unlimited range to our activity." Therefore, Sorel picks and chooses from the philosophy of his countryman, falling into errors against which Bergson himself

warns his readers, and for the task of the reconstruction of external social relationships, when Bergson would assign an important part to the critical intellect, Sorel throws it over altogether. If a reconstructed society is to remain nothing but a vision, making men unhappy by reason of its unrealised beauty, and flinging them heartlessly against the bars of the cage which confines them, Sorel's application of Bergsonism to social change is right; if, however, this beauty is to come and be with us, and we are to dwell in it, then Sorel is wrong. But let me follow his argument a little further.

How is this inspired action to be secured? Sorel has rejected everything of the nature of cool or intellectual calculation. He must discover a way of keeping up the feeling from which inspired action comes, and he finds it in the general strike. The man in the street thinks that the general strike is really the gateway of emancipation. Sorel would rather describe it as "the path." He does not say that the general strike will even be an historical event. It is the wood upon which the flames of enthusiasm feed.

"What," he asks, "would have happened to the Christian Church if the early Christians had not believed in the Second Coming?" It never happened; it was the myth, the guardian angel of unreality, which led the young movement up to

strength; or, in Sorel's own words: "The myths are the mixture of fact and art for the purpose of giving an aspect of reality to the hopes upon which present conduct depends." The general strike is the "myth" of the working-class movement. It may never really happen, but it will be the delusion which will be the cause of whatever does happen. For the strike, when the workers stand together even to the brink of starvation, has "engendered in the working classes sentiments the most noble, the most profound, the most moving that they possess," and the propaganda of the general strike heightens and intensifies these sentiments. "The general strike of the Syndicalists and the catastrophic revolution of Karl Marx are myths," Sorel wrote to his friend Halévy. Commenting on this, Gabriel Hanotaux says: "The 'myth,' according to the thought of M. G. Sorel, is the imaginative and intoxicating symbol which inspires men's souls and causes enthusiasm. It is, in fact, a category of the ideal."

That is one part of Sorel's answer.

The other part is this. It is always a minority which creates important change. Syndicalists make no apology for this conclusion of theirs. Boastfully—at any rate openly — Pouget says: "Syndical action is the negation of the system of majorities." Marx wrote that all historical movements have been those of minorities for the profit of minorities, but

when men are moral enough to make revolutions for the profit of majorities it will still be minorities that will act. Hence it is that minorities will impose their will upon majorities, will make revolutions, and will establish the new order which will be more moral in its conception than would have been possible if sluggish and selfish majorities really ruled the world. For instance, in his *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, Sorel makes special note of and defends the claim put forth by the congress of the French Labour Party held at Romilly in 1895, that a law should be passed applying to all workmen in a trade, whether trade unionists or not, the decisions of congresses of unions of that trade. The immediate problem, therefore, is to organise an active moral minority rather than a passive non-moral majority.

This moral minority will control the mass of the organisation, and it has a right to do so, for its intuitions are the realities of working-class needs and desires. When he writes: "No one can abandon the cause of his comrades without being considered a traitor," he means by "the cause of his comrades" the intuitions of the moral minority. For working-class solidarity is not merely an external thing, an organisation: it is a common life with a movement and change endowing with certain powers and rights those who feel it and act in sympathy with it. Its imperiousness gives its chosen vessels

the audacity necessary to success. "The grand social drama unrolls itself. . . . An audacious minority dragging the mass behind them come to liberate the worker." Here again Bergson is Sorel's master—and with Bergson stands Nietzsche, with his superman at his elbow.

In fact, Sorel throws over the ordinary conceptions of democracy, and having done so, finds himself in some difficulty when he is asked how things will go on the day after the revolution. But when we get Sorel in a corner, he flies away on the wings of fine sentiment. "I do not think," he writes, "that the social revolution can be like a scene of the Apocalypse." We cannot picture its details. It is sufficient for him to be assured that the revolution is to be a success because the feelings of men are to compel it to be a success. Accustom your people to think and act co-operatively (and the Syndicalist propaganda itself does that), then there will be no problem as to what will happen when the Syndicalists have won. "Syndical action develops the intelligences, enlarges the hearts, fortifies the character. 'It reforms the working class from within.'" Indeed, when the push comes, and Sorel has to answer somehow regarding the future, he is found to have the perfect man in his mind, and his justification for his position is that Syndicalism makes such a man. It puts responsibility on him, it teaches him freedom,

it makes him dignified. From this point of view, it is indeed a method for the production of the fittest. That at any rate is the theory. When this personal transformation is accomplished, order will rise with the sun on the morrow of the revolution. In other words, the revolution is not to be made a success by careful planning, but by inspired feeling. Emotion does not only result in action, but in successful action. This curious line of thought will no doubt suggest to my readers those extraordinary chapters in the third volume of *War and Peace,* in which Tolstoy discusses how little influence Napoleon's carefully devised plans had on the results of the battle of Borodino.

There he leaves it. That is the philosophy of working-class action according to M. Georges Sorel, the philosopher-poet of force.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROGRAMME OF DIRECT ACTION

WHOEVER takes the trouble to study Syndicalism will find that it has an esoteric and exoteric aspect. It has one foot on the field of dilettante philosophy, the other upon the rugged territory of hate and of volcanic action. The first I have explained in the chapter on the philosophy of Sorel. For that the workmen do not care a button. To them, the general strike is to be an historical fact and the class war is to be fought out by real men on the stage of the real world. They know nothing of myths; indeed, they would be angry if you suggested that they did. They do not understand Sorel's poetry, but agree with his views about violence.

He is frankly a revolutionist, even if he tells you that he does not believe in force. He believes in a quick and fundamental change by which the workers will come into possession of the tools and the organisation of industry. He believes this is to be brought about by industrial organisation, or—as he likes to call it—" direct action," which ranges from

the most innocent form of collective bargaining to the most unlawful outburst of class vindictiveness. The word "direct" is used because he is not to act through intermediaries or representatives; he is to act himself. He is not to vote for another to do his work; he and his fellows are to do it between them. He is not to cause his ideas to penetrate into society, he is not to form from them the active will of the State and so secure legislation which helps him; he is to fight his enemy directly, he is to oppose his own will to that of the capitalist. It is the personal part he is to play in the stirring drama of revolution which gives him his enthusiasm when he opposes direct action to political action. He proceeds on the assumption that there is no interest in common between his class and the class of employers—for, be it noted, he refuses to think of himself individually: he thinks only of his class. Therefore, he will have nothing to do with agreements, or conciliation, or Parliamentary interference except in so far as they help him with his revolution. He lives in a state of war, his ethics are those of the army in the field—those of self-preservation. But the strike is not only his war; it is his discipline and his inspiration. It keeps him in touch with the reality of his position, it feeds the flame of passion in his heart, it tempers him by sacrifice. He knows that he cannot win so very much by it in its

local form at present, but he waits and prepares for a day when it will be general.

Then, as by magic, the mechanism of society, all its exchange, all its consumption, will stop. Decay will creep upon the paralysed body. There is a grandeur as well as a utility in the thought. He will then prove how important he is—he who has been despised and neglected, underpaid and ill-requited for so long. Society, stricken to its very heart and with the numbness of death upon it, will come as a suppliant to him, and he will dictate the terms upon which he will restore it to vigorous life by his labour. To the other considerations which may be urged in favour of this way of doing things, he is not a little influenced by the spectacular allurements of a melodrama in which he is the hero.

But meantime there is grim work to do. I have said that his ethics are those of the battlefield. He is being preyed upon, and, having no appreciation of historical necessity, he regards himself as being consciously victimised, and therefore entitled to prey back. Law and order are the circumstances of his subjection; property is the prison walls of his servitude. When he is "out" and on strike he thinks of nothing but his immediate success, because he feels no obligations to his society. "What has society done for me?" he asks, with a negative answer in his heart. Moreover, he has to damage

the enemy and make him afraid. "The most effective factor in social politics," writes Sorel, "is the poltroonery of governments." And again: "Violence restores the structure of the classes . . . it appears also as a thing very beautiful and very heroic; it is of service to the primordial interests of civilisation; it can save the world from barbarism." Therefore, the Syndicalist resorts to riotousness. Sabotage is an essential item in the programme of action of the General Confederation. Even when he is "in" and at his work, this same ethic guides him, for is he not systematically underpaid, and why should he do his best? Why should he, dishonestly treated, act with scrupulous honesty? "A mauvais paie, mauvais travail," he says. So he advocates sabotage, or the policy of ca' canny, combined with the more mischievous one of injuring the tools with which he works.

Should a fellow-workman disagree with this programme and ethics, that workman is a traitor. For it is essential for the liberation of labour that all should act together. The man who puts himself before his class, or who considers himself apart from his class, is guilty of a most heinous offence. It is the right of the workmen who are organised—that is, those who are class conscious—to give the note of battle for all the others. Once more, let me remind my readers that the key to this man's mind is found in army discipline and the ethics of war.

Standing on this ground, the State and the nation are nothing to him except the forces by which the industrial order with which he is at war is maintained. Patriotism is the delusion and prejudice which capitalism uses to hide its economic wickedness. He is therefore anti-militarist. He is not only internationalist in sentiment, but he knows that the soldier is the servant of the property owners. If his employer sweats him, the workman cannot call in the soldier to enforce fair wages; if he performs a similar act to his employer and destroys his property, the soldier will march up and face him with rifle and bayonet and a pocket full of ball cartridges. Militarism is, therefore, only an aspect of the wicked world of exploitation in which he lives and moves and has his being. It provides an anti-labour police force when the workman is trying to break the industrial tyranny of which he is the victim. "In each strike, the army is for the masters," resolved the congress of 1906.

The kind of man whose opinions I am explaining does not make his action conform to his theory. The drama in which in imagination he plays is far more highly coloured than the real one which is his life. For instance, though he is an anti-Parliamentarian, he votes as a rule, and then blames his representatives if they do not come up to the "myth" standards by which he has to be deluded

in order that he may be able to keep any kind of faith. The "myth" in actual operation is disruptive not only to society, but to working-class power. In times like the present it can stir up the workers. When capitalism has been trusting to its tyrannical strength and has not been voluntarily sharing its advantages with labour, the gains to labour of "direct action" cannot be denied, and the danger to society that the strike may be adopted again as the only weapon of combined workmen should not be minimised. France has gone much further in this direction than we have. It is said that under revolutionary Syndicalist inspiration there, no fewer than eight hundred strikes per annum occur, and a new organisation of Syndicalist defence is being created. Soup kitchens are being organised by the unions for strikers, and a system of child distribution amongst families not affected is being built up.

In explaining this programme of Syndicalist action notice must be taken of the Syndicalist's view of trade union finance. He is no believer in high subscriptions, in friendly-society benefits, in accumulated funds. He fights on enthusiasm and not on strike pay. "Money," says Pouget, the secretary, "is not for the C.G.T. the sinews of war." A methodical mechanism of administration, a caution, a conservatism, a paralysis of enthusiasm, come from big balances. From this same spirit of liberty and

of initiative comes another peculiarity in Syndicalist organisation. The reformist section of the movement is constantly demanding that the votes which unions can cast at congresses should be proportionate to their membership, but to this the revolutionary wing is always opposed. The opinion of a small union is as likely to be right as that of a large union. Democracy is not based upon numbers, but upon right. The autonomy of the groups is held to be a principle. A big group is a unit of the same kind as a small one. In short, the Syndicalist regards representation at a congress in the same way as an American State regards representation in the Senate. The question was debated at the congress of 1904, when only 388 votes were cast for proportional voting, and 822 were cast against it. Since then the reformists have been gaining ground, though but slightly, and everything points to a prolongation of the existing regime.

Spontaneity in feeling, freedom in action, equality in co-operation within the camp; a sleepless hostility against the enemy, carried on sometimes by guerilla tactics, sometimes by grand engagements all along the line of marshalled forces—that is the pageantry of industrial conflict which allures the Syndicalist of the factory and the workshop.

CHAPTER V

SYNDICALISM IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

FRANCE is the birthplace of Syndicalism, and the General Confederation of Labour is its embodiment. From the earliest days of the organised working-class movement, the Frenchman has been found near the Anarchist Left; when the tide was flowing strongly towards Socialism, his affections moored him to Proudhon, Bakounine and Mutualism, and the French movement has never been free from this conflict. By the end of the 'seventies the politicians had won and Guesdism was on the ascendant. Then three well-marked streams of tendency showed themselves. The Guesdists desired to turn the unions into mere political instruments; the Possibilists, with Paul Brousse at their head, sought autonomy for the unions as such, but strove for a working alliance between them and the political party of Socialism; the Anarchists held the position implied by their title. Midway between the last two stood J. Alleman and his followers. The sections fought, and the split political sections on their flanks quarrelled. The

French movement was in confusion. Thus the 'eighties were passed. Syndicalism was emerging. In 1888 a congress held at Bordeaux voted in favour of a general strike. Other congresses declared their adherence. At Marseilles, in 1892, a resolution stating that legislation cannot settle the differences between Capital and Labour, that only a revolution can give economic liberty, that bloody revolutions only benefit those who have the army behind them, and that therefore the appropriate revolution for the workers is a general strike, was supported, in a memorable speech, by Aristide Briand, whose fortune it was to be Premier and the maker of a serious attempt to carry out his own resolution. The idea spread like wildfire. In 1894 a National Congress met at Nantes, where there was a great trial of strength between the Socialists and Briand. The latter won by sixty-five votes to thirty-seven. That year the Confédération Générale du Travail was formed.

I well remember the storms which played havoc with the International Socialist Congress in the Queen's Hall, London, in 1896. They were raised because French trade unions which had declared against political action desired to be admitted. Syndicalism had already begun. In London it was defeated and ejected, but it went on its own way.

The General Confederation is the National Federation of French trade unionism, and consists of two

sections—that which corresponds in this country to the trade unions, and that which corresponds to the Trades Councils. Each section has its own committee and funds, and there is a joint committee—the Comité Confédérale—for general supervision and propaganda, which agitates for what is known as the "English Sunday," the Eight Hours' Day, and similar things. Feeble in its action at first, whilst attempts were still being made to join up the political and the industrial organisations, it only became important when it passed absolutely under the control of the revolutionaries in 1900. The struggle between reformist and revolutionary is by no means ended, but since that year the latter has been predominant.

Numerically, the Confederation is weak. It is estimated that there are 11,000,000 wage earners in France who might join a trade union, and of those only 1,000,000 are organised. Of those who are organised, again only about 400,000 belong to the Confederation, and at least 250,000 of those are opposed to the violent actions and the revolutionary doctrines of the Comité Confédérale. The C. T. G., indeed, finds its philosophy of minority rule to be very handy. It is a minority governed by an internal minority, owing to methods of voting which secure the predominance of minorities.

The Confederation owns a weekly paper called the

Voix du Peuple, founded in 1900 and enjoying a circulation of about 6000 copies. It is independent of all political parties, and proclaims the doctrines of "direct action." Its chief contributor, Emile Pouget, a name famous in the Syndicalist world, wrote recently in it in heaviness of heart: "Is it not pitiable to think that the interest taken in the paper is secondary to that taken in sport or even in politics." The small circulation of the paper, together with the grievous bemoanings of Pouget, reveal the real weakness of Syndicalism, even in France. In France it is comparatively easy to work up a strike. Working-class solidarity is very real there, and the "myth" of idealism, which Sorel cherishes, constantly keeps the French mind warm. But the French Syndicalist votes at elections, and gesticulates enthusiastically between times on matters political—in spite of the *Voix du Peuple*. An agent, the active Victor Griffuelhes, revolutionary shoemaker, who recently traversed the industrial districts of France on behalf of the Confederation, has written some candid articles on his experiences. His heart, too, is sad. Of the north he writes: "The population is sheepish (moutonnière) and resigned"; "Syndicalist action is taken only to procure election for politicians." In the east there is "a powerful employing class" and "a thoughtless working class." In the south-east, at Lyons, at Grenoble, "there also politics carries on its ravages."

The evidence makes the conclusion irresistible that even in France, where the psychology of the people offers special facilities for the kind of action contemplated by Syndicalism, Syndicalism as a policy is absurdly weak and is not making progress.

In Germany, Syndicalism hardly exists; in Italy, it is part of the anarchistic unsettlement of the working-class mind, and one of the products of the evil politics which have taken root in the peninsula; in Holland, an attempt to organise it has yielded insignificant results; the same is true of Belgium; the northern lands know nothing of it—the recent attempt to declare and carry to a successful end a general strike in Sweden having had no connection with Syndicalist propaganda.

In America, the Syndicalist has received more encouragement. The corrupt state of American politics, the power of the machine, the electoral difficulties presented by a mixed population speaking in many tongues and brought up under very diverse civil conditions, have hampered the growth of a political Labour and Socialist movement, and have encouraged the activities of the Syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World. Moreover, the brutal force which money can exert in America in the workshop, the corrupt force it can exert on the bench and in the capital of every State, make it the most natural thing imaginable for labour to contemplate a resort

to such force as it can command—dynamite, sabotage, bad work, the revolutionary strike.

The condition of the Socialist movement in America also helped this kind of propaganda by action. In its earlier stages that movement came into violent conflict with trade unionism which, under the guidance of Mr. Gompers, was ultra-conservative, and its attack was partly critical and in opposition to the American Federation of Labour, and partly constructive, and attempted to create from the discontent which it was rousing up, a new unionism which it called industrial unionism. From this industrial unionism arose the Industrial Workers of the World.

The first convention of the Industrial Workers of the World was held in Chicago, in 1905. The movement was inspired from the west, where the unbroken-colt spirit of the pioneers made both workmen and employers little inclined to meet each other with mealy-mouthed civility and soft-hearted humanity. The western miners have always been its backbone; it had its effective start in the famous Haywood prosecution for murder in connection with a miners' dispute; Haywood is still its chief apostle. He is the embodiment of the Sorel philosophy, roughened by the American industrial and civic climate, a bundle of primitive instincts, a master of direct statement. He is useless on committee; he

is a torch amongst a crowd of uncritical and credulous workmen. I saw him at Copenhagen, amidst the leaders of the working-class movements drawn from the whole world, and there he was dumb and unnoticed; I saw him addressing a crowd in England, and there his crude appeals moved his listeners to wild applause. He made them see things, and their hearts bounded to be up and doing.

The programme of the "I.W.W." is to organise the wage earners on a revolutionary class basis, to break down the partitions between the organisations of the different trades, so that skilled workmen may co-operate with unskilled, and the strike of one grade may become the strike of all grades. It speaks of the decay of the "craft" trade union which separates workman from workman; and sets up rival interests—as when our railwaymen looked on with apprehension whilst the miners' strike drained the bank balances of their own union. "Every member of the organisation is pledged to a revolutionary policy that admits of no compromise and knows nothing of contracts with the employers, of arbitration, or of peace," is a sentence from a manifesto issued by the Industrial workers during the Lawrence (Mass.) textile workers' strike of last March.

But even in America the organisation of a real Socialist Party is menacing the prospects of the revolutionary body, and the strike is becoming

purely industrial in its character. In every living and expanding society there must be the seeds of revolution, and these seeds must feel the germinating mandate. But when society itself is free to grow, the seeds of revolution produce the plants of peace. The conditions under which that is so are being steadily created in America, and true Syndicalism is weakening in consequence.

CHAPTER VI

SYNDICALISM IN GREAT BRITAIN

THE writer of an article in *The Times* on the 16th of April last stated that "the existence of a strong Syndicalist movement in this country can no longer be denied." As a matter of simple fact, nothing can be denied with more confidence, for Syndicalism in England is negligible, both as a school of thought and as an organisation for action. The *Syndicalist*, the British organ of the movement, contains little matter that need trouble the student. For instance, in the issue for March-April 1912 appears a specially displayed editorial in which the following definition appears: "Instead of the community giving industrial control to the workers, as the Socialists fondly hope, the Syndicalists look to the workers taking such control and giving it to the community"—a definition which is erroneous in both its terms. Most of the Syndicalist advocacy which has hitherto appeared in English is of this character.

The English trade union movement has gone through certain well-marked stages. In the time of Robert Owen it was inspired by doctrines which bore

a striking resemblance to Syndicalism; and, indeed, the writings of the Rev. James Elimalet Smith, the preacher of Universalism, and the friend of Owen, could almost be reproduced by the Industrial Syndicalist Education League and palmed off upon the public as modern work. Then trade unionism settled down, under the influence of men like Broadhurst, Howell, Pickard, and their contemporaries, and became a purely industrial organisation, barring out politics, and trusting ultimately to the strike as its chief weapon both of offence and defence. Once again, Broadhurst's speeches against a legal eight hours' day, and Pickard's attacks upon those who endeavoured to create a political Labour Party, are Syndicalism pure and simple in one of its most important aspects—that of contending that the industrial problem can be dealt with only by industrials using industrial and not political weapons. But in drawing attention to the likeness between trade unionism and Syndicalism one must not make the mistake of the writer to which I have just referred and confuse an active trade unionism with Syndicalism. The revolutionary goal of the latter must always distinguish it from what we have hitherto known as trade unionism. The widened field upon which federated capital operates necessitates a similar widening of the area of a great strike, but that, again, must not be mistaken for Syndicalism. I repeat, in order that I may emphasise it, it is the purpose of

trade unionism which differentiates it from Syndicalism, not the scale upon which it carries on its operations.

In 1906, when the active minority succeeded in creating a Labour Party almost without the knowledge of the passive majority, that majority joined in the shouting and the hoping. The old trade union methods were to be put aside, like the armour in the Tower of London. Parliament and legislation were to make industrial organisation unnecessary. Trade unionism was neglected. The reaction was bound to come. A small Labour Party in Parliament could not do very much beyond what was ripe to be done. It certainly could not satisfy revolutionary expectations. In respect to any specific industrial or trade grievance it could not act so swiftly, or decisively, or directly as a trade union. The balance had to be adjusted; co-operation between political and industrial action had to be effected. Each had to discover that it had a field of its own.

That is what is now going on, but that is not Syndicalism. A leader or two who never held any balanced judgments upon anything, a section or two moved by the impulses of the moment, a certain number of people disappointed with majority rule, and claiming majority rights for the particular minority to which they belong, others convinced (by the recently displayed attitudes of our courts, and

the unwillingness of even a Liberal Government to undo the oppressive effects of these attitudes upon organised labour) that change by political methods is too slow and uncertain, have embraced the new propaganda and have ranged themselves under the new banner of revolutionary direct action. But these sources have supplied only a very tiny rivulet of Syndicalist opinion, and no one would have troubled very much about it had not the sanguinary flavour of the word Syndicalism been necessary as an ingredient for the repulsive mixture of licence and absurdity which is placed by unscrupulous persons before the public day by day in order to disgust it against everything which concerns Labour and Socialism.

The greatest impetus which Syndicalism has received in this country has come from recent prosecutions. They have advertised it with a lavishness which it itself could never have commanded, and their first effect has been to create a considerable demand for its publications. The loose thought which finds its way into resolutions drafted and passed in hot blood has made Syndicalism appear to be a body of thought which the Government desires to suppress, and nothing causes even the meanest and the worst doctrines to prosper so much as prosecution.

The origins of Syndicalism in Great Britain are easily traceable. For a good many years the literature of the American Industrial Workers of

the World has been circulating in this country, but those influenced by it made the mistake at first of attacking our trade unions, assuming them to be too hardened in their ancient prejudices for Syndicalist purposes, so they made no headway. In 1910 Mr. Haywood, the leader of the American left wing of trade unionism, came here and had some success in South Wales, where racial temperament and economic hardship offered special promise for the Syndicalist propaganda, and in July of the same year the *Industrial Syndicalist* was published by Mr. Tom Mann. The ground upon which these seeds were thrown had been somewhat prepared by a movement which some years ago appeared at Ruskin College, Oxford, and which was voiced in a little journal called the *Plebs*. This movement always seemed to me to be the inevitable product of an attempt to send to breathe the atmosphere of Oxford a body of young workmen, able and ambitious, but not sufficiently prepared for the work given them to do. When those who are to lead the working-class movements, either from their practical or their cultured side, fall under the glamour of Oxford as it now is, an intellectual Eurasianism is created, which, finding no hospitable welcome either in the world of culture or in that of democracy, must brood over revolution and be attracted to superficial and grandiloquent theorising. Some of the men were strong enough to keep their heads, but

Syndicalism became for others a pleasant path to fame and notoriety. They were not happy in themselves and in their prospects. They would declare war upon the world.

The *Industrial Syndicalist* confessed to the influence of the Confederation General of Labour as well as that of the Industrial Workers of the World, and its name proclaims its mixed parentage. One searches in vain in its pages for a consistent body either of doctrine or of proposals, and but for the artificial stimulus given to its circulation by the recent prosecutions and the advertisement given to it by a few Conservatives in the House of Commons, it would have had to struggle to live and would have had to be content with its original absolute obscurity.

These things happened just at the moment when the seeds of industrial unrest were being nourished by rising prices, disappointment with railway conciliation boards, and closer union amongst employers. The men's leaders were not perhaps altogether prepared for the change, and the centralised nature of their work kept them out of close touch with the temper that was arising in the workshops. In addition, some of the unions were not in a good fighting position, their funds being drained by unemployment and other benefits. Consequently, whilst the temper of the men asked for a fight, the circumstances of the leaders pressed for a

patched-up peace. There was conflict between the two, and the men disregarded their leaders. Thus arose one of the most characteristic features of the present unrest. But it is no indication either of Syndicalist thought or of Syndicalist action. It is explained on totally different grounds.

The revival of trade union activity was erroneously identified with the Syndicalist movement, and what on the railways and in the mines has been merely a return to the methods of 1860–1890, is thought to be an embracing of a new revolutionary purpose. All that is happening in England at present is that trade unionism as an active force is reviving, and that industrial action is being resorted to with, perhaps, the over-enthusiasm which always follows upon a period of over-neglect.

Another special circumstance has to be taken into account. A strange gap has appeared between the younger men who will lead the unions in a few years and those who are growing old in that service, and at the same time the passive mass of members has become more passive, while the active nucleus has become more active. The results have not been good. For instance, while the recent coal strike was on, everybody behind the scenes knew about the abject failure of some of those leaders who had been most active as agitators before the strike was declared. The sequel was foreseen by many of us. So soon as it was settled, one of those leaders went to

his district and declared that it was time to prepare for another struggle. "Don't you think you might get us out of the present one first?" came from a wise person in the crowd. Some of the men who are coming up to lead have risen too much upon the criticism of the old to be good administrators themselves. They found fault with the existing authority in such a way that they appeared to imply that all authority was undemocratic. An interesting and strange thing happened. The active minds in the labour movement threw off the authority of actions and experience, and imposed upon themselves the far more crushing authority of mere words. "Democracy," "independence," and such-like words became dictators, and because they were so indefinite in their meaning they were all the more futile and impossible in their guidance.

In fact, reverting to the thought of Sorel, a section of the leaders of the trade union revival has used the "myth." By it these men have risen, and now they are bound to it. It has them captive; without it they are shorn of their strength. They must continue to play with their unrealities. They demand them in Parliamentary action. Whilst Sorel toys with his "myth" as with a cigarette in his Boulogne study, they have to render homage to theirs by following it through the agitated waters upon which it has launched their reputations and their fortunes.

CHAPTER VII

AN EXAMINATION OF SYNDICALIST PRINCIPLES

1. *The Class War and Social Unity*

An examination of Syndicalism must proceed in two directions—a discussion of the principles upon which it bases itself, and a criticism of its programme of action. The first is concerned with the Syndicalist view of exploitation of the method of social progress, and, for the present at any rate, of the way in which the means of production when communalised are to be held. The second deals with the more practical problems which are raised by the general strike as a weapon of revolutionists.

The foundation of the whole movement is the proposition that there is a struggle between two great economic classes in society to-day. In one way this is true. The very fact that there are trade unions shows it. But the points arise at once when this struggle is used to explain social progress, to guide social change, or to create a revolutionary movement: Is this struggle clear cut, or are its lines confused, and is there a good deal of interest common to both sides? Is it a struggle which is

predominant in the sense that men on both sides feel that it marks them off in definite antagonism from each other, or is it obscured and weakened by other motives?

The struggle is not clear cut, and it is not predominant. Only by a process of "touching up," of repression of fact and of exaggeration, can society be divided into two classes. It is far nearer to the truth to picture society as consisting of two great activities—that of production and that of exploitation—with an intricate mass of divided interest joining them together. The two outstanding activities, apart and antagonistic though they are, become in society linked by a system of interdependent interests. The exploiter becomes a consumer, and his consumption becomes an essential part of the social economic order. Theoretically, he can never be a profitable citizen for, even when he is getting himself clothed and fed and housed, the labour he employs is unprofitable and, like himself, is parasitic. The luxuries of the rich can never be defended on the ground that they are the opportunities of the poor to make wages, but they certainly manage to justify themselves in the eyes of numerous people whose present income is derived from them.

But the interdependence of interests, however antagonistic theoretically, which grows up in society —and which is society—is not only economic in its character. It is mental. One class looks up to

another; the acts of one class are tolerated, but are disallowed if practised by another; where the heart is, there the treasure is also. Call it sycophantism, call it snobbishness, call it by what opprobrious name one may, there is an orientation of desire which compels the economically exploited to come under the spell of their exploiters and reject their own deliverers.

Then there is a third consideration, which has to be taken into account. Within the two camps of exploiters and the exploited there are economic antagonisms of considerable importance. Fundamentally, there is the antagonism between the producer and the consumer, between grade and grade of workmen—the antagonism which to-day sometimes leads to trade disputes regarding demarcation. The antagonism between producer and consumer is often one between craft and craft, as when a craft for which the finished product of another craft is only raw material, is inconvenienced by increased cost of production through increased wages in that other craft.

Hence, society cannot be described nor the motives of men classified in terms of a simple opposition between two rival sections. Nor would this be so if those who argue that the preaching of the class war will make men "class-conscious," and so bring up into relief the economic conflict as the dominating fact of society to-day. For the view itself is

false—is an abstraction, is unreal. Society is a unity of conflicting interests. These interests can, in imagination, be abstracted from their setting and a pretty drama of irreconcilable opposition can be constructed in consequence. But that is not life. In their vital relationships they are joined in a unity of social interdependence. The unity is imperfect, it is clumsy, it is maintained extravagantly and at the cost of an enormous waste of energy. It can be made more harmonious and economical both as regards wealth and as regards life. But any project of social reconstruction which founds itself upon reality must begin with the facts of social unity, not with those of class conflict, because the former is the predominant fact in society. The conflict is like the pattern on a web of cloth; it is not the stuff itself, it is the manipulation of the stuff. Society is the web—the stuff itself. In spite of an inheritance of somewhat imperfect phrases, this is the position of Socialism, and is one of the reasons why its appeal to all classes is so effective.

2. *Economic Exploitation and Social Evolution*

The facts of exploitation, which the Syndicalist narrates, are admitted so far as I am concerned. That there are classes in society which are parasitic in that they subsist on other people, and that this is owing to the fact that land and the means of production are in private hands and used for private

ends, I do not dispute. Exploitation and its attending poverty are inevitable results of our social mechanism. On this ground there is no quarrel between the Socialist and the Syndicalist.

The mechanism which results in exploitation is, however, not the creation of the exploiting class, but the product of economic evolution. Economic powers had to pass under the control of individuals in order that they might be developed, organised, co-ordinated —in a word, in order that they might be systematised and built up into a world-wide mechanism of production, distribution and exchange. That has been done, and now the same vitality which outgrew feudal relationships is outgrowing capitalist relationships, and the same imperative which enfranchised the middle class is at work enfranchising the wage earner. The difference is that, whereas enfranchisement meant political liberty to the middle class, it means economic liberty to the wage earners. The new order is to arise not by the smashing up of the old by the Syndicalist method of "exterior pressure," but by the maturing of the old itself. Social growth, not class conflict, is to produce it. Society is in process of change, and the workers who are toiling for greater justice are only retarding progress by following the wrongdoing of which they are victims rather than strengthening the social tendencies which make for their emancipation. The creative vitality of society is neither expressed nor strengthened

by sabotage, riots, destruction of industrial capital, or any one of the other minor violences in the Syndicalist programme. Error infinite creeps into our thoughts by false analogy, and the assumption that our economic system is a mechanism itself, and only holds a mechanical relationship to society as a whole, is one of those misleading analogies. It is an organic function of a complete organic social unity, and its transformation must be considered and planned in organic, not mechanical ways. It is to be transformed by the operation of the re-creative impulses which it produces internal to itself. Every stage in social evolution gives birth to the motive for its own transformation. These motives are partly revolutionary, and of the nature of conflicts between opposing interests; but predominantly they are of the nature of general social needs and ideals felt more or less keenly throughout the whole social organism. They are the expansiveness of the whole life, not merely the revolting pains of one organ.

If we regard history as a steady unfolding of the human intelligence in its complete range from experience on the one side to moral idealism on the other, creating for its expression new forms of social organisation as time goes on, we are able to understand most truly not only what the meaning of social change is, but also its method. But if this view be correct, whilst it gives ample justification for agitation, for the propaganda of new doctrines,

for a conscious approach to new social states, it has nothing but condemnation to offer for a class conflict carried on by two sides cheating, robbing, and pillaging each other whenever an opportunity presents itself.

3. *Parliamentary Action and Social Growth*

It also follows from what I have written that the nation is not an abstraction but a real community—a community perhaps within which the relationship of classes requires readjustment. But it has a common life, it is an historical product, it has a law of evolution, and, regarding social agitation carried on by individuals as in reality a product of communal growth, it transforms itself. Therefore Parliament and the historical method, because they do express something deeper than a class conflict, and something wider than workshop antagonisms, are the way in which the expanding life of the community creates new social states. It is true that the class war cannot be carried on in politics, but that is a proof not that Parliamentary action is wrong, but that the idea of the class war is no guide for constructive work, and only suggests an imperfect explanation of the agitations through which society progresses.

Parliament must always be disappointing to those who expect revolutions and dramatic changes, who have never appreciated the resistance to change

which society offers, or who assume that a decree of the legislature can take the place of natural law. The field of profitable Parliamentary action is very much prescribed. Legislation must work with life, not try to tyrannise over it, and life is such a confusing welter of interdependent relationships that legislation very often dislodges an evil from one place only to give it an abode in another. Because it embodies the national will, Parliament is a huge and cumbersome machine of somewhat uncertain working which those who are maintained in the faith by the allurements of a "myth" will never understand and never do justice to. There is in this something like a curse of doom. It is only to the minority that the Promised Land comes as a vision, but the minority cannot conquer it. The punishment of wilderness journeys falls with most exquisite cruelty upon the faithful ones who pitch their tents every night upon the commanding peaks of Mount Pisgah.

But Parliament is essential to social coherent life. Its social legislation will become more precise as it is brought up face to face with the actual problems and as its knowledge becomes more accurate. It is the only guarantee we have that bad industrial conditions will be levelled up, that parasites will not be allowed to prey for ever on other people, that the moral inspiration of a few will be secured by law as a privilege to the many,

that there is continuity in industrial policy. Without Parliament and legislation we would have none of these guarantees. Legislation is not merely the visible bonds by which the community is unified—it is the gain which is not the goal, but the starting-point for further gains.

There is, therefore, a real unity called a nation, which endows the individual with traditions, with habits, with a system of social conduct. The Syndicalist, in this respect being an individualist—being one who lays it down that this national inheritance is unreal, is nothing—can build up no policy upon it. There are no foundations in his mind for Parliamentary government, and he has therefore to base his hopes of industrial harmony on such loose and shifting sands as "the educated man," "the moralised man," "the enlightened trade union," "the moral, active minority," and like varieties. Like every one who loses grip of reality, he has had to find refuge in high-sounding words.

Before passing from this section it is worth while referring to another argument which the Syndicalist offers in support of his anti-political position. The State to-day is a bourgeoisie with features, interests and prejudices which I have already described. That being so, he contends, it cannot rise above itself, and its political decisions must be of the same nature as it is itself. This argument, stated in different ways and in different connections, is very

common in political discussions, and yet the answer is obvious, and is twofold. I have already suggested it, but so persistently is the point made by some of the more active sections of our advanced movements that I think it necessary to make specific reference to it.

In the first place, the description of the State is not accurate in the sense that it is not full. It is true that even under a democracy there is much inequality in political power, but that inequality is never so great as to make democratic power merely nominal. The democracy can put an end to the bourgeoisie State whenever it likes. If it does not like, the defect is one in the quality of citizenship, and such a defect, if it be not removed, will destroy the Syndicalist State itself. There is a school of agitators belonging to the political parties of the Left that is kept alive upon the error of blaming the State for what is a weakness in the citizen.

The second reply is equally conclusive. Assume that the Syndicalist descriptions of the State are correct, and that we do live under a bourgeoisie dominance, as I have already argued. Every dominating interest and class produce within themselves forces which ultimately change them. The description of a regime, therefore, consists of three sections: its origin, its characteristic features, its transformation—its whence, its how, and its whither. A State such as the Syndicalist says our present

capitalist States are, is, therefore, not a stable relationship. It is a relationship in whose fabric change is busy through millions of tremors, impulses, jars, decays, substitutions, and more particularly through the unceasing activities of the moral consciousness which is always planning better things, beautifying, dreaming, and the horizon of which is being widened by every progressive step taken. Even the bourgeoisie State has its potentialities, and these are never quiescent. Therefore, so far from a description of a State from the point of view of its material interests and class prejudices, being a proof that the action of that State can never rise above the level of such interests, exactly the opposite may be argued, and the argument supported by all our experience of history. A sun which sinks in drenching rain is not doomed to rise through hopeless wet.

4. *The Organic Community and the Industrial State*

The Syndicalist is to build up from economic foundations only. His State is to be one of "free producers," and not citizens, and it is to be divided up into unions of workmen engaged in the various processes of production, and owning collectively the instruments with which they work. The very obvious reflection upon this proposal is that the Syndicalist State is to be the very worst form of exploiting State, composed of groups of distinct

interests of producers, organised in corporations which own industrial capital, and which must be often in opposition to each other, generally to the consumers, and always to incomers. The Syndicalist State is to be an evolution of trust capitalism unchanged in its nature rather than of industrial citizenship broadened in its responsibilities. In a way of which only the Napoleonic trust magnates of America dream, will capital dominate the State under Syndicalism. For the workman is just as incapable as the capitalist of keeping national interests and concerns constantly in front of him when he is working under conditions which make exploitation in his own interests easy, and which offer him every inducement to regard himself first and every one else afterwards. The only security which a community ever can have against exploitation is that its industrial capital is controlled in such a way that neither producer nor consumer can sacrifice each other by each one pursuing primarily his own immediate and special interests. This, however, means control after the fashion of civic authority, and condemns Syndicalism with the same emphasis as it does Capitalism.

Moreover, if we try to follow the details of the Syndicalist proposals, we find that they assume a simple separation of craft from craft which, as a matter of fact, does not exist. The workshop is not

nowadays the scene of the activity of one craft, but of many. Are the engineers employed in the cotton industry to help to control that industry, or are cotton operatives alone to be recognised? Where are clerks to come in? How are labourers to be grouped? If every work-place were to be managed separately, as the original labour co-partnership dreamers proposed, this practical difficulty would be of no great consequence. But the Syndicalist's views are very different from that. It is the craft, and not the workshop, which is to be self-governing, and that never can be unless the shadow of Time is to wander back reversely over the dial, and the Middle Age come again. The basis of economic Syndicalism is as false as the basis of its critical philosophy.

Those are the chief prepositions at the foundations of Syndicalism. They appear to me to be so unsound that it is hardly worth while examining the programme of action which rests upon them. But to some extent it is true that Syndicalism is nothing but a programme of action. So I shall consider the programme of Syndicalism apart from the principles upon which it is said to rest.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROGRAMME OF SYNDICALISM

THE special and characteristic method by which the Syndicalist hopes to achieve his purpose is the general strike. He is organising and uniting labour with a view to getting labour to lay down its tools one fine day, go out into the market-places with its hands in its pockets, and listen to the busy hum of society cease. From the silence of this death, he believes, the voice of a new life will arise. When he has proved the impossibility of the existing order by bringing it to a standstill, he imagines he will be called in to start it afresh, and from a collapsed capitalism a vigorous industrialism is to spring into being in a single night. He is to create a revolution by passive resistance. If all this is moonshine and myth, so is Syndicalism as a form of industrial activity.

Unfortunately, the method of political controversy now adopted by the Reaction is to shout "Boo!" to geese, and the geese, having become so familiar with the "Boo" of Socialism that they are beginning to

cease to waddle about when it is shouted in their ears, are being frightened out of their lives by the new "Boo" of Syndicalism. Were it not so, no one need discuss at any length the fantastic programme of revolution produced by the Syndicalist. It is as likely to dominate trade unionism as are the tenets of Johannah Southcote to become the established religion of England.

The general strike can be declared for two purposes. It can be used to secure some specific demand—say an extension of the franchise, the resignation of a Government, or the defeat of a war party; if used for political purposes, as it well may be; or increased wages or any other trade union claim if used only for industrial purposes; or it can be used to make revolutionary changes in social relations. It may succeed in the first two instances; it never can in the third. In the first instances everybody understands its purpose, and, in the nature of things, before the strike can be successfully declared, the grievance which it is aimed to remove must have become intolerable. As a last resort, as a *coup de grâce*, it may be justifiable, and need not be unsuccessful.

When its aim is a social revolution, however, the case is quite different. There is no definite conception in the minds of even the moral minority—to say nothing of the victimised passive majority—as to what the social revolution is to be, what it

is to mean in detail, and what it is to do exactly. It is no goal, it is an idea. The forces fighting for it can, therefore, have no real coherence, because they can have no definiteness of purpose, or, to speak more accurately, perhaps they may be coherent for destruction, but they are sure to be split up for construction—a very common state for a revolutionary party to be in.

Moreover, let us try and form a mental picture of what will go on whilst the strike lasts. The old-fashioned sectional strike did not hit directly at society, the new-fashioned general strike does, and that is a very profound difference. A district was inconvenienced, an employer or group of employers was injured, numbers of working-class families in a limited field were hard pressed, but they more than recovered in a very short time. That was under the old conditions. The general strike of Syndicalism works in a totally different way. It empties markets, it raises prices, it stifles consumption throughout the whole community. And what does that mean? It hits the poor people heaviest, the middle classes next, and the rich least of all. If surrender is therefore to come by social pressure the programme works from exactly the wrong end, for the class that must surrender first is the poor, and the surrender of the poor does not mean the triumph of the revolution, but the collapse of the strike.

The force of these considerations is augmented when we consider how a general strike may be brought about. It can never come about on a really national scale for the simple reason that whilst public opinion rules the country, the opinion which would make a general strike possible will not wait for such an event to make itself felt. What is far more likely to happen is that the transport workers of all grades may strike—and that is all that is required. That would paralyse every other industry, because distribution is as essential to social life as production. But here we have a paralysis in which only one or two sections of industry are taking part. The other sections will not even have the balm of sympathy to soothe their sufferings. The resentment will be hot; the reaction will be swift and overwhelming. When the railwaymen were in a disturbed state in August 1911, not a few miners' officials shook their heads; when the miners were on strike in the following March railwaymen's officials were telling us how grievously they were losing their funds and advantages.

This argument may be put in a more general form. The Syndicalists assume that when the general strike comes time will be on their side. Exactly the opposite is true. Time will be against them. As the days go, Society will organise itself against them, because Society, as well as the

individual, is moved by the Will to Live. Meanwhile, labour must stand idly by and see the recovery. The assumption of a progressive paralysis is false.

But the crowning miscalculation of the Syndicalist is that the general strike can be a revolution during which the workman's part is just to cease work. The programme on paper may be as passive as any Tolstoyan could wish, but it must become active before long. That would happen for two main reasons. In the first place, the organisation of society would resist paralysis, as I have just shown. It would seek to protect itself through public opinion, voluntary organisation and force. Criticism would play upon the revolutionary movement and disintegrate it, and as the experience of every strike has shown, it is just the elements that might lean towards Syndicalism that are least stable under such circumstances. The "myth" under revolutionary pressure splits up the Lord's anointed into chosen sects, it does not weld them into a universal Catholic Church. Triumph kills the "myth." With the stoppage of the usual machinery for the giving of service and the exchange of labour, a rudimentary organisation would be adopted, as during the general strike in Sweden, when students drove cabs, or as during our own railway strike, when solicitors tried their hands at the honest occupation of carrying the luggage of travellers. But this

organised resistance must bring both sides nearer and nearer to an appeal to force. The strike cannot be indefinitely prolonged; mere standing idly by when your programme is being slowly circumvented becomes impossible. You have to do something. Society will certainly, and properly, mobilise its troops and use them, and you must reply.

A resort to violence would be forced upon the strikers for another reason to which I have also referred. Long before the well-to-do are seriously damaged by the strike the poor are starving. Starting with revolution as their purpose, will they starve quietly? Will they keep calm after they have discovered that what was to be the destruction of their enemies has turned out to be nothing but the undoing of themselves? Of course they will not, and so the soldier comes in.

Thus we see that all this parade of passive resistance is nothing but words and phrases. It is the stage paint which has to be washed off before one sees what manner of a man the Syndicalist is. He is just a very old-fashioned revolutionist who makes the mistake of thinking that because he wishes for passive resistance alone during a strike, he can secure his desires.

The old revolutionist I respect. He understood his business. He prepared for the work of barricades and street fighting. He knew that a revolu-

tion had to be carried through by activity, not passivity. The childish dream of revolution by paralysing society never entered his head. Revolution must always be more or less paralysing, but he knew that the less paralysis the better. So he sought to seize the centre of government, to issue his proclamations of the new order, to keep things going, to give the old order no chance of recovering itself. When he began his exploits he knew he had to work night and day, not idle night and day. His watchword was, "Tools up," not the Syndicalist one of "Tools down." He went straight to the point of appeal to force, and he made his plans accordingly; the Syndicalist dilly-dallies and will not face the consequences of his own policy. He is playing at revolution. Compared with the old revolutionary he is lacking in direct vision, in courage, in ability to state both to himself and those whom he is influencing what is the real nature of the work he has taken in hand or how he is to accomplish it. Nor was it of small importance in view of the fury of the game he was playing that the old revolutionist provided himself with danger and excitement; the Syndicalist revolution, calling for as much determination as the old, is to proceed like a drudgery. It would be nothing but a nursery game if it were not so serious in its consequences to organised labour.

If the grand programme of Syndicalism is a mere

delusion, its immediate action is mischievous. Sabotage, destruction of industrial capital, perpetual strikes, injure the workers far more than any other class, and rouse in society reactionary passions and prejudices which defeat the work of every agency making for the emancipation of labour. They put labour in the wrong. The Syndicalist might be an *agent provocateur* of the capitalist, he certainly is his tool. In so far as he succeeds it is only by the old and most primitive methods of trade unionism, and to get his small successes he spends extravagantly the money, suffering, energy and loyalty of his followers. In all crusades of reformation a defiant enthusiasm and a hope that will accept no denial are necessary, but when these are substituted for "reflection, good sense and persuasive wisdom," they are the furies of destruction rather than the energies of progress. That fatal substitution is made by Syndicalism.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

THE one outstanding service which Syndicalism has done—though done so badly that its value has been counterbalanced by other consequences—has been its emphasising that organised labour must not go to sleep in the belief that others are doing its work. Industrial organisation, pressure, diplomacy are as necessary to social progress as political action. But the two must act together.

Three views may be taken of labour action. The first is that of the pure and simple State Socialist who believes that Parliamentary action is everything and that the State is to suppress and supplant every form of individual and voluntary action which has a direct public significance. This school is numerically weak, and its chief activities are not conducted systematically, but spasmodically. We had an illustration of them in the action of the Socialists who opposed the Insurance Bill. On the other extreme is the Syndicalist movement which has been the subject of this study. Then there is the third way,

which is that upon which the British Labour Party is trying to walk. Organised labour operating in the factory and workshop, keeping alive labour issues and labour demands, acting with a Parliamentary Party which steadily changes social organisation in all its relationships, preserves the State against reaction, keeps the way of progress open, and secures the permanence of every gain acquired. The individual and the State, the voluntary organisation and the compulsory communal relationship, freedom and law, co-operate together to preserve and strengthen the individual both as a person and as a citizen. On that path emancipation lies, and the wild ravings of our opponents misrepresenting and attacking that policy ought not to be overlooked by those who are carefully surveying the prospects of the future.

A trade union has been defined by law as being, amongst other things, an organisation which regulates the relations between employers and employed. The means by which this regulating is to be done changes from generation to generation as industrial organisation and opinion regarding the relation between the State and the workshop change. Hence, in due course trade unionism had to establish a footing on the field of politics, for there its battles were being fought with an increasing frequency. But it must not occupy that field exclusively. Parliament is Olympian. It is always somewhat apart from the

life of the people. Its work is general. The trade union must be ready to take swift and decisive action, to force to the front with rapidity and firmness questions which Parliament would avoid rather than settle, to protect from deterioration conditions of life which are subject to the daily pressure of adverse industrial forces, and to advance on every opportunity and by scores of different ways other than political the standard of working-class life. But the unions cannot now get away from the fact that every important industrial conflict must spread far beyond the place where it first broke out. The interests both of labour and capital are so wide and so dependent upon a far-stretching process of interchange of service, that they are no longer local but national and international. These conflicts must therefore issue into political problems. A miners', a railwaymen's, a dockers' strike has at length to be settled by the House of Commons as representative of the common interest of consumers and as guardian of social order and peace. This is a fellowship of action born not merely of industrial change but of moral desire, and it is to remain as a characteristic of our society.

This fellowship of direct and indirect action requires, and must produce without delay, great representative federations of both capital and labour. The day when the small sectional union could serve labour

is ended, and with it has gone the purely local dispute. Employers lock out men all over the country because there is trouble in one parish; workmen lay down their tools at John o' Groats because some workmen at Land's End are on strike. The consequences are obviously both inconvenient and dangerous, but they are in the nature of things and are not to be avoided by repression or by angry complaint. They only remind us that the perfecting of national production and the organising of national and international markets have raised problems, tremendous in their meaning and importance, which are as closely associated with progress as are the blessings which also come in its train. Whilst trying to understand the meaning of these problems we ought to guard against a slipshod method of sticking misleading labels upon them. The absorption of the small sectional union and the federations of unions covering the whole of individual or related trades into a unified industrial organisation is not Syndicalism. It is political industrialism. Political industrialism seems to me to point out the only safe road of further progress. On the one hand it is beset by Syndicalism, the impatient, frenzied, thoughtless child of poverty, disappointment, irresponsibility; on the other by Reaction, the blind, whining, timorous offspring of ignorance, self-indulgence and class prejudice. These are the triple forces that are to fight

for the control of the State in our time. One can only strive so that from the conflict of these three rival hosts there may emerge in safety and strength a community ruled by those who are giving service to the whole, and enlightened by a spirit of comradeship which is kept pure by a quickened social conscience.

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